Ethical Leadership and Workplace Spirituality in Enhancing Work Enthusiasm: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality through work enthusiasm as a mediating variable. This study uses a quantitative design to test the proposed hypothesis. Data were collected from 260 employees in an education-based agency in Malaysia through a self-administered questionnaire. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to evaluate both the measurement and the structural model. The findings support the indirect relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality through work enthusiasm. Furthermore, the findings also confirm the mediating role of work enthusiasm in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality in the proposed model. The results of the analysis show that ethical leadership practices in the daily operations of the organization are able to increase the level of work enthusiasm. The effect of this increase in motivation indirectly contributes to the strengthening of spirituality in the workplace. This study provides valuable insights to practitioners in understanding the complexity of work enthusiasm in the context of ethical leadership. The implications are that these findings can inform the development of more effective strategies and action plans to achieve organizational goals in the increasingly challenging era of globalization.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, Workplace spirituality, Work enthusiasm, PLS-SEM.

Introduction

Intense competition between local and global companies has placed great pressure on managers to maintain business continuity and competitiveness (Al-Kwifi *et al*., 2020; Liden *et al*., 2025). In this increasingly challenging environment, shareholders are now more sensitive to the morale, integrity, and competence of employees, which are partly influenced by the leadership and management style of the organization. According to Brown and Treviño (2006), ethical leadership refers to behavior that complies with moral norms as demonstrated through the leader's personal actions and social interactions, as well as efforts to foster ethical behavior among followers through open communication, positive behavior reinforcement, and value-based decision-making. Trustworthy people who value every team member, treat everyone equally and impartially, and always behave with complete accountability and integrity are traits of ethical leaders (Serang *et al*., 2024; Korakis & Poulaki, 2025). Studies have also shown that leaders and supervisors who uphold high moral values not only provide support to their employees, but also practice ethical leadership through fair decisions, being considerate, and always ready to help organizational members (Guo, 2022; Garrido-Moreno *et al*., 2023).

In recent decades, interest in the study of ethical leadership has increased, reflecting the recognition of the significant influence of leaders in shaping ethical behavior in organizations, especially towards workplace spirituality and work enthusiasm. According to Shava and Chinyamurindi (2022), workplace spirituality refers to the personal efforts of individuals to find meaning and purpose in life, which are expressed through the practice of deeply held personal values. From an individual perspective, spirituality in the workplace is also known as an intrinsic approach that emphasizes that organizations are formed by individuals who have various interpretations and beliefs about aspects of spirituality (Lewis, 2019). Key figures in the study of spirituality in the workplace, such as Joelle and Coelho (2017), believe that individual spirituality encompasses employees' desire to be fully present at work, carry out meaningful tasks, and find meaning in life through the application of deep personal values. This perspective suggests that a work environment that supports individual spiritual aspirations and values can encourage positive behavior and improve work performance (Astakoni *et al.*, 2022; Korakis & Poulaki, 2025). Meanwhile, work enthusiasm refers to a person's enthusiasm, excitement, and positive attitude towards the work they do, which is reflected in motivation, determination, and active involvement in daily tasks. It is a form of emotional and cognitive drive that motivates employees to consistently.

Although the role of leadership in organizations has been the focus of much previous research, research on ethical leadership in the public sector context is still limited and underdeveloped both theoretically and empirically (Adele & Ellinger, 2024). A review of the current literature reveals several significant conceptual gaps that require further research attention. First, there is a lack of comprehensive and specific theoretical models that integrate ethical leadership, work enthusiasm, and workplace spirituality, especially in the complex and bureaucratic public sector environment (Beattie *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2014). The absence of this conceptual framework complicates understanding the causal mechanisms that explain how ethical leadership can foster work enthusiasm, which in turn contributes to workplace spirituality. Second, despite the growing interest in the study of work enthusiasm, most previous research has examined it in the context of organizations in general, without specifically focusing on forms of leadership support such as ethical leadership (Adele & Ellinger, 2024). Third, although past studies have recognized the role of work enthusiasm as a catalyst for work performance and well-being, there is still a lack of research examining the function of work enthusiasm as a mediating variable in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality. This dynamic relationship is important to understand so that organizational interventions can be strategically designed to leverage the role of leadership in creating a meaningful work environment and supporting employees' spiritual aspirations.

Based on these gaps, this study was conducted to develop and test an integrative model that examines the mediating role of work enthusiasm in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality in the public sector context.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Ethical Leadership

In the organizational context, employees form an understanding and practice of ethical behavior by observing the actions and decisions of their leaders. Ethical leaders are characterized as individuals who are trustworthy, respectful of all parties, act fairly without bias, and carry out their responsibilities ethically and accountable (Al Halbusi *et al.*, 2023). In addition to serving as role models, ethical leaders also play the role of influential mentors in the organization. Their charismatic personality allows them to attract attention and directly influence the behavior of subordinates. In leadership and follower relationships, individuals who believe their leaders to be ethical tend to receive positive responses from the leader through social exchange mechanisms (Alhaidan, 2024). Leaders who adhere to ethical values tend to make transparent and fair decisions, as well as show a willingness to support and help individuals around them, thus strengthening ethical leadership practices in the organization (Al Halbusi *et al.*, 2023).

Work Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm as a meaningful psychological construct serves as a key pillar in the context of modern work, playing an important role in influencing individual performance, levels of engagement, and overall psychological well-being of

employees (Taormina & Gao, 2008; Engidaw, 2021). It is not just a positive attitude towards work, but reflects emotional and cognitive commitment to the role one plays in the organization. Enthusiasm is defined as an intrinsic drive that drives individuals to perform tasks with satisfaction, enjoyment, and appreciation for their work (Taormina & Gao, 2008; Engidaw, 2021). These characteristics reveal a high form of internal motivation that can stimulate employees to maintain momentum and perseverance, even when faced with complex job challenges and pressures. In a dynamic and competitive organizational context, the presence of passion not only significantly increases individual productivity but also contributes to the creation of a healthy and collaborative work culture (Taormina & Gao, 2008; Engidaw, 2021). Employees who have a high work enthusiasm for their work tend to show proactive initiatives, solve problems creatively, and make more meaningful contributions to the empowerment of innovation and continuous improvement.

Workplace Spirituality

In the organizational context, workplace spirituality has been shown to improve employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness (Chenji & Sode, 2024). Several concepts related to workplace spirituality include non-cognitive aspects, higher levels of awareness (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Garg, 2017), and internal attitudes. Workplace spirituality is not just an individual element but also plays a role in shaping employee values and personalities, thus positively influencing organizational culture. It is often referred to as the experience of employees in performing their tasks meaningfully and professionally in the organizational environment (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Garg, 2017).

Ethical Leadership and Workplace Spirituality

The relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality can be effectively explained through the Leader–Member Exchange Theory (LMX) proposed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). This theory emphasizes that leadership effectiveness does not solely depend on the style or characteristics of the leader but is built on the quality of the dynamic two-way relationship between the leader and each team member. In this context, ethical leadership serves as the foundation for the formation of high-quality LMX relationships, as it emphasizes the values of integrity, fairness, trust, and concern for the well-being of employees (Brown *et al*., 2005). Therefore, through the lens of LMX Theory, it can be concluded that ethical leadership plays a critical role in building high-quality exchanges that instill spirituality in the workplace, improve overall employee well-being, and contribute to the development of more ethical, meaningful, and resilient organizations.

Recent empirical studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality. A study conducted by Malik *et al*. (2023) involved qualitative research using semi-structured interviews of 10 employees of two Pakistani textile organizations. The findings reported that ethical leadership (work ethic values, positive behavior, and personality of the leader) is more important in building workplace spirituality than employee beliefs and perceptions. Based on this theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Ethical leadership is positively associated with workplace spirituality

Ethical Leadership and Work Enthusiasm

The relationship between ethical leadership and work enthusiasm aligns with the Ethical Leadership Theory (Brown *et al*., 2005). This theory has opened a new dimension in the understanding of leadership styles in modern organizations. In this theory, leaders are seen not just as individuals who direct and make decisions, but as moral agents who play an important role in shaping ethics and values among employees. This approach places ethical behavior, justice, and honesty as the main foundations of effective leadership practices.

The literature review on human resource development highlights that empirical evidence consistently demonstrates a positive correlation between ethical leadership and work enthusiasm. A questionnaire was the main tool utilised in Guo's (2022) study, which collected data from 276 workers in Macau's service industry. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between ethical leadership and work enthusiasm. A study conducted by Li (2024) investigated the correlation between ethical leadership and work enthusiasm. The study data were collected from 248 research and development (R&D) personnel working in companies in the emerging industry sector in China. Data

analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Path Modelling (PLS-PM) method. The results confirmed that ethical leadership was a significant predictor of work enthusiasm. Based on this theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Ethical leadership is positively associated with work enthusiasm

### *Ethical Leadership, Work Enthusiasm, and Workplace Spirituality*

The mediating role of work enthusiasm in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality can be effectively explained through Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986). According to SCT, human behavior is largely shaped through observational learning, where individuals acquire new skills and behaviors by observing role models within their social environment. In organizational settings, ethical leaders serve as powerful role models whose behaviors employees are likely to emulate. These leaders demonstrate morally grounded decision-making, genuine concern for employee well-being, and a commitment to higher organizational purpose.

Empirical studies have demonstrated positive correlations between ethical leadership, work enthusiasm, and workplace spirituality. The study conducted by Chouhan (2025) involved a survey using a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data from a sample of 387 employees across various industries. Factor analysis, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis were performed using SPSS and AMOS software. The findings confirmed that work enthusiasm serves as an effective mediating variable in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality. Based on this theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Work enthusiasm mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality

Research Framework

Figure 1 shows the researches framework for this study was developed through a comprehensive literature review.
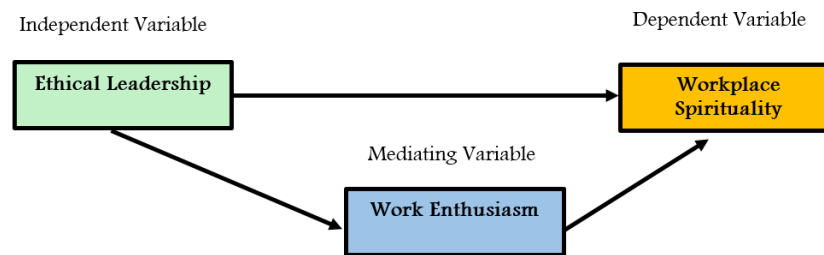
Figure 1. Research Framework

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional strategy to collect questionnaire data from respondents in the organizations studied. The survey approach allowed the researcher to systematically obtain quantitative data, ensuring accuracy, relevance, and high quality while minimizing the risk of bias or sampling error. As stated by Creswell (2014) and Sekaran and Bougie (2016), systematic and objective data collection techniques are essential in producing valid and reliable research findings.

The data collection process began with the development of questionnaire items based on a review of the latest literature on ethical leadership. This step ensured that the questionnaire was built on empirical evidence and aligned with the context and objectives of the study. The selection of accurate and significant items was essential to produce an effective research instrument.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, it was translated into Malay and English versions using the back translation technique as suggested by Wright (2015). To ensure the accuracy of the translation, the researcher involved two experienced lecturers in the field of management to translate and review both versions of the questionnaire. This process is very important to avoid any translation inaccuracies that could affect the meaning and understanding of the questionnaire items by the respondents. By ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the research

instrument, the respondents' understanding can be improved, thus reducing confusion among respondents from different languages and cultural backgrounds.

Sampling

The unit of analysis in this study consisted of employees currently serving in the organization under study. The purposive sampling technique was used to distribute 300 questionnaires to employees across various levels and job categories in different divisions or departments. Purposive sampling was chosen since the management of the company was unable to provide a comprehensive list of all personnel because of confidentiality regulations and efforts to preserve the company's good name and corporate image. Therefore, in contrast to the random sample method, a more regulated and selective strategy was utilised to pick respondents. 260 (86.66%) of the 300 surveys that were sent were filled up and sent back to the researcher. Every respondent gave their consent without any coercion from management, guaranteeing complete adherence to research ethics guidelines during the investigation (Ahmed *et al*., 2022; Dhanasekar *et al*., 2022; Ekpo *et al*., 2023; Tabassum *et al*., 2023).

Instruments

The research instrument consisted of three main parts: ethical leadership, work enthusiasm, and workplace spirituality. Seven scales were adapted from Langlois *et al*. (2014) and Park, McLean, and Yang (2008) for the assessment of ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is defined as the ability of leaders in an organization to help and guide employees to improve performance, develop skills, and achieve professional goals. Sample items included: "leaders suggest new methods for completing tasks with honesty", "leader offers accurate source of information ", and "collaborative work environment".

Four scales were adapted from Parker (1998) to measure work enthusiasm. In an organizational context, work enthusiasm refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a task or achieve a specific goal successfully. Sample items included "I am confident in my ability to present an effective task" and "I am confident in my ability to carry out the task".

Workplace spirituality was measured using six scales adapted from Pawar (2024). Workplace spirituality is the development of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities of individuals or groups to perform tasks or roles more efficiently and effectively (Pawar, 2024). Sample items include compassion, (b) mindfulness, and (c) meaningful work.

All items are rated on a seven-point response scale, ranging from "strongly disagree/strongly dissatisfied" (1) to "strongly agree/strongly satisfied" (7).

Procedure

The data analysis was conducted in two phases. The data were initially analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software in the first phase. This initial step was crucial in ensuring the collected data met quality standards for further analysis (Hair *et al*., 2017). This process involved several critical procedures, including detecting outliers to avoid inaccurate results due to extreme values that might not represent the true population. The analysis also focused on identifying missing data, which could arise from collection errors or incomplete responses. This analysis provided a solid foundation and ensured the data met all the statistical prerequisites for subsequent analysis (Savva *et al*., 2023; Erlina *et al*., 2024; Landry *et al*., 2024; Sivasli *et al*., 2024).

The second phase utilized SmartPLS software to evaluate the structural model. SmartPLS was selected for its ability to handle more complex models and assess relationships between latent variables. SmartPLS enabled the analysis of direct relationships, indirect effects, and interactions within the model through the PLS-SEM approach. This approach gave researchers the advantage of testing hypotheses more comprehensively than traditional analytical approaches (Badrieva *et al*., 2023; Bisri *et al*., 2023; Saada *et al*., 2023; Karim *et al*., 2024; Mohammad *et al*., 2024; Rohmani *et al*., 2024).

Results and Discussion

Sample Characteristics

The demographic analysis indicated that the majority of respondents were female (72.3%), aged 40-45 years (31.9%). Most were married (71.9%) and held a Malaysian Higher School Certificate (36.5%). A significant portion belonged to the support group (71.9%), held grade 1-18 positions (45.8%), and were in permanent employment (79.6%). Additionally, 32.3% earned a salary between RM2000 and RM2999, while 31.7% had less than five years of service.

Assessment for Measurement Model

This stage aimed to establish construct validity by assessing the scale items used in the study. This evaluation was essential for accurately measuring each construct within the model. **Table 1** presents the convergent validity analysis, where all constructs achieved outer loading values above 0.708, as recommended by Henseler *et al*. (2009) and Hair *et al*. (2017). This finding suggests strong associations between items and their respective constructs, confirming good convergent validity. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded 0.5 (Hair *et al*., 2017), indicating that over 50% of the variance in each construct was explained by its associated items, thus meeting the minimum threshold for convergent validity. Moreover, all constructs demonstrated composite reliability values above 0.8, signifying strong internal consistency (Hair *et al*., 2017). This reliability assessment verified that the items within each construct were consistently and reliably measuring their intended concepts.

Table 1. Convergent validity analysis

Constructs	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach Alpha
ETHICAL LEADERSHIP				
ETHLP1	0.932	0.973	0.839	0.968
ETHLP2	0.914			
ETHLP3	0.920			
ETHLP4	0.939			
ETHLP5	0.881			
ETHLP6	0.901			
WORK ENTHUSIASM				
WRKEM1	0.764	0.953	0.804	0.938
WRKEM2	0.892			
WRKEM3	0.951			
WRKEM4	0.937			
WRKEM5	0.928			
WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY				
WPSTY1	0.894	0.973	0.858	0.967
WPSTY2	0.943			
WPSTY3	0.930			
WPSTY4	0.932			
WPSTY5	0.929			
WPSTY6	0.929			

Table 2 displays the Heterotrait-Monotrait Correlation Ratio (HTMT) values, which evaluate the discriminant validity of the constructs. Discriminant validity ensures that constructs are conceptually distinct and do not overlap. The analysis showed that all HTMT values were below 0.85 for each construct pair, aligning with the threshold recommended by Hair *et al*. (2017) for acceptable discriminant validity. These low HTMT values confirm that each construct captures a unique aspect of the study variables.

Table 2. Discriminant validity using HTMT analysis

Constructs	Ethical Leadership	Work Enthusiasm	Workplace Spirituality
Ethical Leadership			
Work Enthusiasm	0.425		
Workplace Spirituality	0.852	0.523	

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) assesses the difference between observed and model-implied correlation matrices, measuring the average discrepancy between expected and actual correlations. According to Hu and Bentler (1999), SRMR values below 0.10 or 0.08 are considered acceptable. Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015) introduced SRMR as a goodness-of-fit metric for PLS-SEM to prevent model misspecification. As shown in **Table 3**, the SRMR value of 0.073 indicates a good model fit.

Table 3. Model fit analysis

Model Fit	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.050	0.050
d_ULS	0.432	0.432
d_G	0.454	0.454
Chi-square	678.273	678.273
NFI	0.893	0.893

Table 4 presents the variance inflation factor (VIF) and descriptive constructs analyses. The mean values ranged from 1.000 to 1.199, indicating that employee perceptions of ethical leadership, work enthusiasm, and workplace spirituality were between high (4.0) and very high (7.0). These findings suggest respondents' positive perceptions of ethical leadership and its impact on work enthusiasm and workplace spirituality. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) analysis, performed to assess collinearity among constructs, showed values below 5.0, suggesting no significant collinearity issues that could impact the analysis (Hair *et al*., 2017). Consequently, the research model exhibited statistical stability, allowing for reliable conclusions about the relationships between constructs (Aloufi *et al*., 2022; BaSalamah *et al*., 2022; Hungund *et al*., 2022; Karpov *et al*., 2023; Medvedev *et al*., 2023; Sapunova *et al*., 2023).

Table 4. VIF and descriptive statistics

Contructs	VIF	Mean	Sdt. Dev
Ethical Leadership -> Work Enthusiasm	1.000	5.652	1.112
Ethical Leadership -> Workplace Spirituality	1.199	5.831	0.816
Employee Spirituality -> Workplace Spirituality	1.199	5.773	0.963

Assessment of Structural Model

The coefficient of determination (R^2) measures the model's overall predictive accuracy, indicating the extent to which exogenous variables explain variance in endogenous variables. According to Cohen (1988), R^2 values can be classified as large (0.26), medium (0.13), and small (0.02). The structural model test results, with R^2 values of 0.16 for work enthusiasm (medium), 0.71 for workplace spirituality (large) (Bahanan, 2023; Al-Sunbul *et al*., 2024; Cantile *et al*., 2024; Dainius *et al*., 2024; Kumar *et al*., 2024).

Next, effect size (f^2) assessment determines the change in R^2 when exogenous constructs are removed from the model, enabling understanding of construct effects on endogenous variables. Cohen (1988) classified f^2 values into three categories: small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35) effects. The results of the effect size analysis revealed that: 1) ethical leadership on work enthusiasm f^2 = 0.199 (medium effect), 2) ethical leadership on work spirituality f = 1.611 (large effect), and 3) work enthusiasm on workplace spirituality f = 0.115 (medium effect).

The blindfolding procedure (Q^2) was employed to evaluate model quality. This strategy systematically omits data points in endogenous construct indicators to assess predictive accuracy. Hair *et al*. (2017) stated that Q^2 values should exceed zero to indicate adequate predictive accuracy. The analysis yielded Q^2 values of 0.00 for ethical leadership, 0.129 for work enthusiasm, and 0.605 for workplace spirituality. These values, exceeding zero, confirm the model's predictive relevance and ability to generate meaningful predictions for endogenous variables, supporting Hair *et al*. (2017) guidelines.

Bootstrapping was used for hypothesis testing to assess statistical significance. **Table 5** presents the results: (1) Ethical leadership was positively and significantly associated with workplace spirituality (H1, β = 0.744; t = 16.280; p = 0.000), (2) ethical leadership had a positive and significant impact on work enthusiasm (H2, β = 0.408; t = 5.508; p =

0.000) and (3) ethical leadership exhibited a positive and significant effect on both work enthusiasm and workplace spirituality (H3, β = 0.081; t = 2.537; p = 0.011). These findings confirm the validity of hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.

Table 5. Hypothesis testing

Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
H1: Ethical Leadership -> Workplace Spirituality	0.744	0.741	0.046	16.280	0.000
H2: Ethical Leadership -> Work Enthusiasm	0.408	0.413	0.074	5.508	0.000
H3: Ethical Leadership -> Work Enthusiasm > Workplace Spirituality	0.081	0.084	0.032	2.537	0.011

The main findings of the study indicate that work enthusiasm plays a crucial role as a mediating variable in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality. This finding strengthens the theoretical framework, suggesting that leaders who uphold ethical principles not only have a direct impact on employees' spiritual well-being but also influence their intrinsic motivation, which in turn enhances their spiritual experiences at work. The mediation analysis provides empirical evidence that work enthusiasm acts as a key mechanism linking ethical leadership styles with dimensions of spirituality, such as meaningful work, shared values, and self-awareness within the organizational setting. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating that ethically driven leadership interventions enhance organizational outcomes not only directly but also indirectly by nurturing employees' motivation (Aljulayfi *et al*., 2022; Alshaer *et al*., 2022; Balaji *et al*., 2022; Singh *et al*., 2022).

This finding is supported by the mediating model proposed in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) by Bandura (1986), which emphasizes that individual behavior is influenced by motivation, where individuals acquire knowledge and skills through observing others, particularly those they perceive as role models. In the context of ethical leadership, leaders who demonstrate ethical behavior serve as inspiring role models for employees. Through this observational process, employees not only develop competencies in task performance but also enhance their motivation and the belief in their ability to achieve goals and perform tasks effectively. These results are consistent with previous research by Chouhan (2025), which revealed a positive and significant relationship between ethical leadership and work enthusiasm. The study supports the view that ethical leaders stimulate employees' motivation through value-based, trustworthy, and exemplary behaviors. Furthermore, the increased sense of self-confidence resulting from this motivation also reinforces aspects of workplace spirituality, such as experiencing meaning in work, alignment between personal and organizational values, and self-awareness in daily responsibilities. Overall, this finding provides empirical support for the theoretical model linking ethical leadership, work enthusiasm, and workplace spirituality, and enhances our understanding of the mediating role of work enthusiasm within this process (Alizadeh *et al*., 2022; Mehrzad *et al*., 2022; Salama *et al*., 2022; Sofiah *et al*., 2022).

Limitations and Future Research Directions
This study acknowledges several limitations in its framework and methodology that impact the understanding of the relationship between ethical leadership, work enthusiasm, and workplace spirituality. First, it employs a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time. While this approach effectively identifies relationships among the variables, it does not determine whether specific factors directly cause poor workplace spirituality or if underlying issues contribute to the outcomes. Second, the study does not examine the direct link between ethical leadership and other elements, such as quality of work life, despite the importance of leadership in enhancing competence and employee well-being. Third, although the path model analysis using SmartPLS helps explain relationships between variables like work enthusiasm and workplace spirituality, it only accounts for the variance within selected variables and does not consider other organizational influences. Fourth, the sample is restricted to staff in education agencies in Peninsular Malaysia, and the sampling method further limits the generalizability of the

findings. As a result, the conclusions apply primarily to the government sector and cannot serve as a universal reference for all organizations. Future research should expand to include diverse sectors and employee groups for a more comprehensive perspective.

This study provides several important recommendations for future research to deepen the understanding of ethical leadership in the Malaysian education sector and enhance the reliability of findings. First, future studies should incorporate demographic factors such as age, type of service, education level, and years of experience. Including these variables would help identify patterns and differences in employees' perceptions of ethical leadership, offering more comprehensive insights into its effects on diverse employee groups. Second, researchers should adopt longitudinal approaches, particularly for studies analyzing changes in employees' work-life balance over time (Ismail *et al*., 2023). This method allows for a more in-depth examination of how ethical leadership influences employees over an extended period, providing a clearer picture of its long-term effects. Third, future research should explore specific elements of ethical leadership, including goal setting, action planning, effective feedback, and accountability. These components are essential for enhancing employee well-being and job performance. A focused investigation into these aspects is necessary, as they significantly impact self-efficacy and competency growth. Lastly, future studies should examine employee well-being as a key factor (Mohamad *et al*., 2024). Understanding the impact of ethical leadership on employee well-being in challenging and dynamic work environments can provide valuable insights. Such research would help organizations develop policies and initiatives that foster a better work-life balance while improving productivity and job satisfaction (Benhmida & Trabelsi, 2024; Khyade *et al*., 2024; Pakalapati *et al*., 2024; Sowbaraniya & Syam, 2024).

In summary, future researchers should take these recommendations into account to conduct more rigorous and relevant studies that advance knowledge in ethical leadership. Gaining deeper insights into population differences and other influencing factors can lead to more contextualized and comprehensive findings, further enriching the existing literature in this field.

Implications

Practical Implications

To strengthen ethical leadership in organizations, several key recommendations should be considered by management. First, organizations should implement leadership training and development programs that emphasize professional coaching techniques, including workshops and regular refresher sessions, to ensure leaders continuously enhance their skills (Aruta *et al*., 2023; Meena *et al*., 2023; Sarkar *et al*., 2023). Second, a coaching culture should be embedded in daily practices, where leaders actively demonstrate ethical leadership by consistently guiding employees rather than treating it as a temporary initiative. Third, a recognition and reward system should be established to appreciate leaders and employees who actively engage in the coaching process, fostering a culture of ethical leadership (Aldhairyan *et al*., 2022; Alshehri *et al*., 2022; Vamvuka *et al*., 2022). Fourth, coaching sessions should be aligned with organizational goals by integrating them into key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure performance improvements align with strategic objectives. Fifth, continuous monitoring and feedback should be implemented with short- and long-term goal setting to evaluate individual and organizational progress. Sixth, organizations should assess the financial impact of coaching on employee performance and overall organizational success, highlighting its economic benefits and management implications (Dirican, 2022).

Additionally, tailoring coaching programs to align with organizational culture and workforce needs can enhance the effectiveness of interventions. Organizations that prioritize collaboration may benefit more from coaching programs focused on team dynamics and interpersonal skills rather than solely on individual performance. Ethical leadership should also be adapted to employees' experience levels. New employees may require foundational guidance to build confidence, while experienced employees may benefit from advanced coaching strategies to address more complex challenges. Furthermore, management should establish measurable performance indicators, such as productivity changes and employee retention rates, to assess the effectiveness and cost efficiency of coaching initiatives. Regular feedback sessions are also essential to ensure continuous improvement and the long-term impact of ethical leadership on organizational performance (Aldhairyan *et al*., 2022; Alshehri *et al*., 2022; Vamvuka *et al*., 2022; Meena *et al*., 2023; Sarkar *et al*., 2023; Naseri & Sasani, 2024; Temirbekova *et al*., 2024; Wang, 2024).

Conclusion

This study confirms that work enthusiasm serves as a crucial mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality within Malaysian educational agencies. By developing a conceptual framework grounded in extensive literature and theoretical perspectives on ethical leadership, this research highlights its role in enhancing workplace spirituality. The factor validation analysis results indicate that the measurement scale employed meets high validity and reliability standards, ensuring data accuracy and the credibility of findings. Additionally, hypothesis testing using SmartPLS verifies that work enthusiasm effectively mediates the connection between ethical leadership and workplace spirituality. Specifically, employees with higher motivation levels are more responsive to ethical leadership, leading to improved competence and job performance. These findings align with previous research from both Western and Asian contexts, reinforcing the idea that work enthusiasm plays a significant role in amplifying the impact of ethical leadership. Prior studies have demonstrated that strong leadership can empower employees, boosting their confidence in their abilities and motivating them to take initiative, ultimately driving them to achieve organizational goals more effectively.

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